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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to quantify the characteristics of "good" advertising guest speakers and compare the expectations of students in different settings. Sixteen guest speakers who spoke during the same academic year to introductory classes, advanced classes, and student organizations of an advertising program at a midwest university were evaluated by 197 students who attended the speeches. Results indicated that: (1) students rated speakers as "qualified," "friendly," "intelligent," and informed"; (2) in all three environments, only the "expertise" factor was a significant predictor of speaker evaluations; (3) things students liked most about guest speakers were how interesting the topic was, the speaker's personality, and the speaker's use of props/visual aids; (4) expected grade influenced what was liked most about the presentation; and (5) students at club meetings were more likely to remember "how-to-get-a-job tips"; while students in classes were more likely to list items related to the practice of advertising. (Three tables of data and 19 footnotes are included.) (RS)

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War Stories can make Horror Stories: The Characteristics Students look for in a "Good" Advertising Guest Speaker

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War Stories can make Horror Stories:
An Analysis of the Characteristics
of an Advertising Guest Speaker

Abstract

Most advertising instructors experience the anxiety associated with wanting to best serve students by bringing them in touch with guest speakers only to be embarrassed by a guest presenter who is uninteresting, unprepared or conceited.

This study attempts to quantify the characteristics of "good" guest speakers and compare the expectations of students in different settings. This preliminary data set begins to uncover predictors of what students use as a basis to evaluate a speaker as "good". Confounds like the setting of the speech, type of class or meeting the speaker is invited to, and the type of student doing the rating are considered.

Advertising Division-Teaching

War Stories can make Horror Stories:
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of an Advertising Guest Speaker

Introduction

There is probably nothing with more potential to damage student perceptions of a faculty than A poor performance by a guest speaker may be a faculty member's worse nightmare outside of the fears associated with operating audio-visual equipment. Any advertising instructor who has arranged to have a guest presenter visit a college classroom has likely experienced the discomfort of sitting through a presentation that disserved the students because it was poorly presented, ill-prepared, developed into a sales pitch or became a forum for a speaker's latest grievances with his/her boss. In addition to losing the credibility and respect of one's students, the most serious damage done to a faculty who invited such a guest may be a future reluctance to invite speakers.

Yet advertising instructors best serve students by bringing them in regular contact with advertising practitioners because of the nature of advertising programs, which should, "... provide direct preparation for careers in advertising."[1] Advertising programs "have a history of trying to ensure that the programs they provide mesh with identified needs of the industry that hires grads of those programs." [2]

The thrill students get from studying advertising seems to peak with the appearance of colleagues, alumni and professionals as guest presenters. Speakers who are involved in various aspects of the advertising process can open students' eyes to the diverse opportunities available. Conversely, poor speakers can leave students confused and dismayed about the course as well as their future in advertising. Teacher evaluations for a course that featured poor speakers may also be adversely affected.

The important role of guest speakers in advertising education requires answers to several questions. First, what are the characteristics of a <u>good</u> speaker? Dimensions such as credibility, expertise and attractiveness have commonly been associated with effective communi- cators.[3] However, a primary goal of this study was to find what <u>students</u> identified as a good guest speaker. The study started out by identifying attributes students relate to a "good guest speaker." Those attributes most often mentioned in this preliminary step were included (n=9) using a semantic differential format along with a <u>good-bad</u> dimension in a questionnaire distributed whenever guest speakers appeared at a medium-size, Midwest university to present ideas to advertising classes or advertising student groups (e.g., AAF-affiliated Ad Club or Business/ Professional Advertising Association chapter).

Other questions addressed in the study included: What are the characteristics that students like and dislike most about guest speakers? What content are students most interested in listening to? Do student expectations and evaluations differ depending on the setting for the guest presentation (e.g., classroom or organizational meeting)? What influences do year in school or gender have on guest speaker evaluations?

Literature Review

Attribution theory helps to outline the characteristics most important in affecting students' judgments of speakers and also explains the tactics students are likely to use to arrive at judgments about speakers.[4]

According to attribution theory, a speaker's perceived credibility and expertise are influential in a listener's evaluation. Substantial research on source credibility has identified expertise as one dimension of a multi-dimensional factor that also includes "dynamism and safety,"[5] "attractiveness and trustworthiness,"[6] and "authoritativeness and character."[7] The last two categories (authoritativeness and character) have the most solid theoretical grounding, having been validated by McCroskey.[8] Items used under the headings "safety" and "trustworthiness" are similar to those grouped under McCroskey's "character" dimension, while items under "dynamism" and "attractiveness" compare to measures of "authoritativeness."[9]

Evaluations of a speaker's credibility are influenced by the apparent motives or intentions of the speaker and by the speaker's perceived expertise.[10] Motives rarely come into play for a guest speaker, since the primary purpose is to inform.

Students are likely to judge expertise based on the speaker's title, the reputation of the his/her company and how fluent the speaker delivers the message. Therefore it is important to consider students' evaluations of the speaker's method of delivery as well as the content of the speech.

One potential confound to an attribution theory-based influence on speaker evaluations relates to student expectations of performance in the class. One study by Beatty and Zahn, found expected grade influenced ratings of the "character" of an information source.[11] Although the source in this study was a teacher, the similarity in perceived status to someone brought to class as a guest speaker makes this variable worthy of consideration. Both teachers and guests are likely to be inherently perceived as experts because of their status in the classroom.

Method

Sixteen guest speakers who spoke during the same academic year to classes and student organizations of an advertising program at a Midwest university were evaluated by students who attended these speeches (Total n=197). A

5-minute instrument was distributed after each speaker concluded his/her remarks. Respondents were asked to indicate the environment for the presentation (e.g., classroom, student organization meeting, etc.), their reason for attending, major, year in school and gender.

Five-point semantic differential scales were also used to measure student perceptions of the speaker. The nine items chosen for these scales were a result of a two-phase process: 1) items identified in previous literature on source credibility found to represent the two primary dimensions (authoritativeness and character),[12] along with items from the evaluative component of attitudes outlined by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum;[13] and 2) soliciting lists of adjectives that best described a "good" advertising guest speaker from students other than those included in the results of this study. Student input in developing a valid measure was supported by Berlo et al, who argue that perceptions of a source must be defined by the receivers.[14]

The final list of items selected for the instrument (See Table 1 for items) seemed to focus on three important components of a guest speaker: presentation style (e.g., interesting, enthusiastic), qualifications of the speaker (e.g., intelligent) and content (e.g., relevant, use of visuals and real examples). The use of visuals and examples was difficult to capture within the parameters of the semantic differential measure. Consequently this component

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was measured through open-ended questions that probed what listeners liked most, least, and what main points were made during the guest presentation.

Results

Sample characteristics

About 80% of respondents were advertising majors, with the remainder majoring in related disciplines such as broadcasting and business. Seniors made up 49% of the sample, juniors 35%, with the remainder being sophomores or graduate students. No freshmen were represented in the sample. About 53% of the sample was female.

Speaker Evaluations

Univariate means: Students rated speakers as "qualified," "friendly," "intelligent" and "informed" and to a lesser extent "exciting." (See Table 1)

Table 1 here

Dimensions of speaker evaluations: Principal components analysis of the 10 semantic differential items produced a two-factor solution which accounted for almost 50% of variance. (See Table 2) A seven-item personable factor included the "good" item, as well as "interesting," "appealing" and "friendly" and produced good reliability (alpha=.76). A two-item expertise factor included the items "qualified" and "understandable" and had moderate

reliability (alpha=.49). The "relevant" item failed to load on either factor and was dropped from further analysis. Sum scores on the two multi-item scales were used in further analyses.

Table 2 here

Multiple regression: To explain the influences on a "good" rating for advertising guest speakers, stepwise multiple regression was used. Pearson correlations (See Table 1), showed a minimal concern for multicollinearity as a confounding effect when interpreting regression results.[15]

The "personable" factor, which included the "good" item, was used as the dependent variable to assess the various influences on speaker evaluations. (See Table 3) Three separate regressions were run for speakers in 1) an introductory advertising course; 2) upper level advertising courses (e.g., senior level media planning and account management or graduate research courses); and 3) club meetings.

In all three environments, only the "expertise" factor, was a significant predictor. (See Table 3) When the remaining variables were forced into the equation, some interesting results emerged across environments.

In intro classes, "expertise" seemed to be less important than in the other environments. In addition,

expected grade in class was negatively related to speaker evaluations, meaning the lower the expected grade, the higher the evaluation. Students more advanced in their academic careers (e.g., seniors) gave better evaluations than less advanced students (sophomores and juniors--freshmen are not allowed in intro classes at this institution).

In advanced classes, expected grade and year in school had little relation to evaluations ($B<.1$), but both relationships were positive.

In organizational meetings, "expertise" was the most powerful predictor of speaker evaluations across the three environments. In addition, younger (juniors) students and those expecting lower grades (e.g., B or less) rated guests higher.

Other findings

Overall, the things students like most about guest speakers are how interesting the topic is (43% mentioned), the speaker's personality (23%) and the speaker's use of props/visual aids (21%).

Expected grade seemed to influence what was liked most about the presentation. 'A' students were more likely to mention things related to the content of the speech as most liked, while 'B' students were more likely to mention characteristics of the speaker's personality as most liked.

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Students listening to guest speakers at club meetings took different things home with them from their experience than classroom students. As expected, at club meetings, students were more likely to remember "how-to-get-a-job tips," while students in classes were more likely to list items related to the "practice of advertising," like a better understanding of how the advertising business functions or what are the proper steps to successful advertising strategy. However, this finding varied depending on the specific class. In advertising media classes, students were more likely to mention "job tips" as the main points they learned from the presentation, while comments related to "jobs" and "practice" were equally mentioned in the introductory class.

Conclusions & Observations

As continued criticism and scrutiny of higher education induces administrative responses that include documentation of faculty performance[16] (usually through student evaluations), attention to details that can influence ratings of faculty will increase. One potential influence on student perceptions of faculty is the type of guest speakers one invites to become part of the curriculum.

For advertising program planners, one important revelation of this study is the different desires that students have depending on the setting for the guest lecture.

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At organization meetings, a speaker perceived to be "good" needs to be perceived as an expert as well as being interesting and exciting. Content-wise, students seem more interested in hearing how to obtain a job or an internship.

On the other hand, students in class want to make a connection between material presented by a guest speaker and course objectives or assignments. Maybe the often used threat of testing students on the content of a guest lecture puts students in this mindset.

Based on attribution theory, it may be that students' preconceived notions of how speakers in the two environments should differ influences their evaluations. In the classroom, especially upper division classes, students may assume speakers have been chosen because of their expertise and expect them to present material relevant to the course. When these expectations are not met, students evaluate speakers less positively. At meetings, students EXPECT speakers to be "personable" to keep their attention and interest. In cases where instructors want the "unexpected" from speakers, outlining the purposes of the speech to students in advance may temper expectations.

This study raises the possibility of identifying positive and negative qualities of selected speakers. In terms of this university's advertising program, speakers tend to be perceived as highly "qualified," "intelligent" and "informative," while being perceived as less "exciting"

and "appealing." Future invitations can be extended with a concern for choosing "dynamic" speakers. For a specific situation, faculty may be able to use these results to predict what audience expectations will be and satisfy those expectations with an appropriate speaker.

Knowledge of the factors influential in affecting guest speaker evaluations allows instructors to help guest lectures come off better. For example, although the guest speaker has almost complete control over the quality of the delivery method, the instructor can have some influence on perceived delivery quality. Making sure the proper A/V equipment is available and that it functions properly can influence the perceptions of a speech.

Imposing a delivery method that relieves the guest of the anxiety-arousing burden of preparing a 30 to 60 minute lecture may also influence students' perceptions of a guest lecture. One such delivery method is the talk show format, where visitors are asked to prepare answers to questions developed and screened beforehand.[17] This format also seems to help students focus on the main points of the speech since the questions posed help to accentuate the key topics.

Despite all the efforts by the instructor, sometimes a guest lecture will simply be awful. One saving grace for instructors' is research on source effects by Howland and Weiss that shows the influence of a bad speaker on future

perceptions diminishes with time.[18] A bad experience with a guest speaker early in the semester may wear off before faculty evaluations are collected at the end of the year. This information may also suggest a strategy of inviting new or unknown speakers early in the semester.

Limitations and Future Research

Several important limitations to consider when interpreting the results are the single geographic area represented by the data and the small portion of the sample representing evaluations at organizational meetings (only 21% of total evaluations came from Ad Club or B/PAA meetings). Although it is unlikely that evaluative criteria would vary across regions of the U.S., criteria may change when comparing schools in or near large metropolitan areas with schools in areas isolated from advertising communities, since the quality of speakers available may differ considerably.

Future research efforts must focus on expanding the data set, both longitudinally and latitudinally. Several years of data from the same university will allow clearer identification of trends or "ruts" in the pattern of invitations extended and will allow more stable analysis within subgroups such as good versus poor students (based on grade point average).

Latitudinal expansion of the data set will allow greater generalizability of results. In addition, surveys

conducted at several universities may produce valuable insights concerning differences in the quality of guest speakers across the country. Regional "norms" can be established to help instructors evaluate the "pool" of speakers available to them. Universities located in areas where guests may be drawn from several localities (e.g., Washington, DC, Baltimore, northeast Virginia) may be able to identify the area which produces the most interesting visitors for students.

Obviously, assessing the relationship between guest speaker evaluations and faculty evaluations is another future direction the research introduced here needs. In addition, starting a data collection like the one described here can provide valuable feedback for guests invited to campus. Since the data collection process is an ongoing one, once the instrument and the computer programs have been set, it takes little effort to input a session's evaluations, break out summary results and forward them to the individual within 24 hours. This type of feedback usually encourages guest speakers to improve and be sharp on repeat visits.

Overall, students rated guest speakers at this university positively on most dimensions. Despite the added work for faculty to schedule such visits, students generally seem to appreciate the effort. As Wesson says, "Some view classroom visitors as vacations for instructors. It isn't;

I'd rather do my regular routine. But the benefits are worth it. And it's better than fighting with A/V equipment."[19]

Endnotes

1. Task Force on Journalism and Mass Communication Education, "Challenges and Opportunities in Journalism and Mass Communication Education-Advertising Curriculum," Journalism Educator, 44(1):A-10 (1989).

2. Ibid.

3. See K. Giffin, "The Contribution of Studies of Source Credibility to a Theory of Interpersonal Trust in the Communication Process," Psychological Bulletin, 68(2): 104-119 (1967); D. Berlo, J. Lemert and R. Mertz, "Dimensions for Evaluating the Acceptability of Message Sources, Public Opinion Quarterly, 33(4): 563-576 (1969); J.C. McCroskey, W. Holdridge and J. Tomb, "An instrument for measuring the source credibility of basic communication instructors," Speech Teacher, 23:26-33 (1974); J. Sutherland and S. Sethu, "The Effect of Humor on Television Advertising Credibility and Recall," in F. Feasley (ed.) Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the American Academy of Advertising, 1-6; R. Ohanian, "Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness," Journal of Advertising, 19(3):45-50 (1990).

4. H. Kelley and J. Michela, "Attribution theory and research," Annual Review of Psychology, 31:457-501 (1980).

5. Berlo, Lemert and Mertz, op. cite.

6. Ohanian, op. cite.

7. Sutherland and Sethu, op. cite.

8. James McCroskey, "Special Reports: Scales for Measurement of Ethos," Speech Monographs, 33:65-72 (1966).

9. Ibid.

10. R. Baron and D. Byrne , Social Psychology, (Newton, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1984)

11. Beatty and Zahn

12. McCroskey(1984), op. cite.

13. C. Osgood, G. Suci and P. Tannenbaum, The measurement of meaning, (Urbana, IL:University of Illinois Press, 1957).

14. Berlo, Lemert and Mertz, op. cite.

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15. W. Berry and S. Feldman , Multiple Regression in Practice, (Newbury Park, CA:Sage Publications, 1985).

16. C. Sykes, ProfScam, (NY:Regnery Gateway, 1988).

17. D. Wesson, "Talk Show Format takes Pressure off Visiting Speakers," Journalism Educator, 39(3):19-20 (1984).

18. Carl Hovland and Walt Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness," Public Opinion Quarterly, 15(4):635-50 (1951).

19. Wesson, op. cite.

Table 1
Mean Scores on Individual Measures of Attitudes toward Guest Speaker and Intercorrelations among Measures

Items	Mean
Good	4.24
Qualified	4.51
Intelligent	4.42
Friendly	4.42
Informative	4.41
Understandable	4.36
Relevant	4.27
Interesting	4.14
Appealing	3.99
Exciting	3.60

Pearson correlations

	qual	intel	frd	info	unde	rel	int	app	exc	yr	grd
Good	.26	.55	.28	.43	.31	.30	.47	.47	.51	.06	-.03
Qualified		.34	.17	.36	.40	.22	.18	.41	.27	-.03	-.06
Intelligent			.29	.35	.22	.11	.33	.31	.34	.15	-.11
Friendly				.22	.18	.18	.45	.33	.24	-.05	-.09
Informative					.30	.30	.46	.32	.35	-.02	-.02
Understandable						.30	.21	.36	.32	-.10	.04
Relevant							.28	.31	.22	-.09	-.05
Interesting								.41	.43	-.06	-.01
Appealing									.59	-.09	-.05
Exciting										-.07	-.03
Year in school											.10
Expected grade											

Table 2
Factor Loadings on Individual Measures of Attitudes toward Guest Speaker

LABEL:	I Personable	II Expertise	h^2
Items			
Good	.75	-.21	.60
Intelligent	.69	-.15	.50
Interesting	.68	-.34	.58
Exciting	.68	-.18	.49
Appealing	.67	-.08	.45
Informative	.65	.22	.47
Friendly	.51	-.37	.39
Qualified	.50	.56	.57
Understandable	.48	.54	.52
EIGENVALUE:	3.80	1.14	
VAR. EXPLAINED:	38%	11%	
ALPHA:	.76	.49	

Table 3
Predictors of a "good" guest speaker evaluation
by type of speaking environment

Introductory advertising course

Significant (p<.0001) Predictor variables	"Expertise"	Others Yr schl	Exp.Grade
Beta	.42	.102	-.166
(S.E. Beta)	(.35)		
Multiple R=	.42		

Upper division advertising courses

Significant (p<.0001) Predictor variables	"Expertise"	Others Yr schl	Exp.Grade
Beta	.47	.053	.016
(S.E. Beta)	(.26)		
Multiple R=	.47		

Organizational meeting

Significant (p<.0001) Predictor variables	"Expertise	Others Yr schl	Exp.Grade
Beta	.66	-.05	-.07
(S.E. Beta)	(.23)		
Multiple R=	.66		